

### **3.0 FIRE HAZARD ASSESSMENT**

The hazard of wildland fires within the assessment area was determined through evaluation of existing fuels, public meetings and interviews with public officials and fire suppression crews. The assessment of the existing conditions and public information was collected on two different occasions. The west side of Bear Lake County, was inventoried during fall of 2002 while the east side was inventoried during the fall and winter of 2003/2004.

#### **3.1 Field Survey**

During the field survey, all roads within communities and subdivisions were driven and inventoried visually. All of the subdivisions on the east side of Bear Lake and some on the west side of Bear Lake were gated. These subdivisions were inventoried from the nearest road. Photographs were taken of the various fuel conditions existing within the assessment area (Appendix B). Aside from isolated houses and cabins, there are thirty-five approved subdivisions within the assessment area. Assessments were completed for each of these specific thirty-five points and included (Appendix C):

- Fire hazard assessment forms (Form 1) for each of the approved subdivision and communities visited. This data provides the general land features (slope, aspect, elevation) and fuel types and sources within each assessment area. Each element was evaluated at each subdivision or community to determine if the potential fire hazard was low (Class A), medium (Class B), or high (Class C).
- Structural hazard assessment forms (Form 2) for each area visited. Elements such as structure density, proximity of fuels, building materials, survivable space, existing roads, response times and access were appraised during field visits. As in Form 1, each element was evaluated at each assessment point to determine if the potential fire hazard was low (class A), medium (class B), or high (Class C). The symbol "N/A" was entered for situations that did not apply to these sections. Structures were defined as homes and other buildings (i.e. barns or outbuildings) with economic value to the landowner, or historic buildings.

#### **3.2 Public Meeting**

A public meeting was convened in Montpelier at Bear Lake County Search and Rescue on February 18, 2003 at 7:30 pm. The community was invited to attend through a newspaper announcement in The News-Examiner (Montpelier) on February 10 and through public announcements on the local KVSJ Radio. Specific mailings were sent out on February 11 to the County Commissioners, Mayor, Chamber of Commerce, Sheriff, Chief of Police, Montpelier Fire Department, Bear Lake County Volunteer Fire Department, Bear Lake National Wildlife Refuge, U.S. Forest Service, USDA-NRCS, Idaho Fish and Game, and other individuals in the assessment area. Additional meetings were held during the summer of 2004. The first meeting was convened on July 9. Invitations were sent out to the County Commissioners, Heads of the local fire departments, homeowners association presidents, Federal and State Fire Managers. Copies of the plan were available for public review and comment at the following locations:

Montpelier City Hall  
Bear Lake County Courthouse  
Bear Lake County Library  
Paris City Library

A review was placed on the county website with guidance on obtaining or reviewing a copy of the plan. A public service announcement was also broadcast courtesy of the local radio station. Copies of announcements can be found in appendix D.

### **3.3 Interviews with Public Officials**

To obtain data for the community profile (Form 3) and to complete the potential mitigation possibilities for hazards identified, North Wind Inc. and Bear Lake Regional Commission personnel conducted interviews with the Bear Lake County Volunteer Fire Department Fire Chief, the Montpelier Fire Chief, and the Idaho Department of Disaster Services. Other elected officials and the general public provided additional comments at the public meeting and some written comments were received after the public meeting.

## **4.0 GENERAL SUMMARY: FIRE HAZARD, STRUCTURAL ASSESSMENT, AND COMMUNITY PROFILE**

### **4.1 Form 1: Fire Hazard Assessment**

Within the assessment area, the dominant fuel in and adjacent to communities and subdivisions is a mixture of grass, sagebrush, aspen, cottonwood, and conifer stands. With the exception of the subdivisions around Bear Lake and Bailey Creek, most of the assessment area is still grazed and harvested. Those areas relegated to recreational housing contain tall, dense grasses with medium to heavy letter, and an overstory of dense sagebrush. Bailey Creek was particularly heavily vegetated due to the predominant north aspect. Conifer stands were limited to the areas facing north or the lee side of the mountain or wet areas and mountainous regions above 8000 feet. Regardless of the location there is a high probability of fire, which, with proper weather conditions, could spread very rapidly across the landscape in most areas.

Below is a summary of each of the elements assessed. The complete results are shown in Table 2.

- Slope: Slopes within the assessment area had a range of 2% to over 30% in some of the steeper canyons and along the scarp face of the east side of Bear Lake and the west slope of the Pruess Mountain Range (Appendix A: Figure 5).
- Aspect: Most of the communities in the assessment area are built in flat valley locations. Exceptions to this rule are the subdivisions around Bear Lake and Bailey Creek which faces north (north aspect).
- Elevation: Elevations within the assessed communities and subdivisions vary by small amounts. Bailey Creek was the high point at 6,222 ft (amsl) and the subdivisions on the East side of Bear Lake were the low elevations at 5,990 ft (amsl).
- Vegetation Type: Within the assessment area the vegetation is consistent with that found at a location of high elevation, low precipitation and short warm